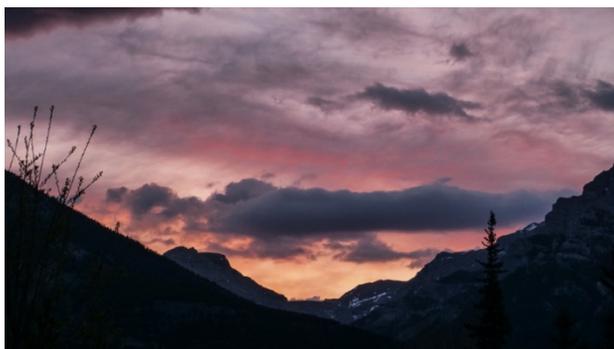




# Newsletter

“Working together to build a stronger, kinder and more just community”

## STONEGATE MINISTRY DURING COVID-19



There is less traffic on the road, fewer people scurrying around our neighbourhoods and our playgrounds are empty. Stonegate Ministry’s thrift store **Great Finds** has closed, our drop off service has been suspended and most Stonegate Ministry programs have been curtailed, but the needs of the members of our two communities have not stopped. In fact, the needs of these communities have increased.

The clients of **Christ Church St. James Food Bank** that we partner with, still have need of food. In fact, our Store

Manager, Jeannie Martinez who is one of the directors of that program, advises that she has seen an increase in new clients to the food bank. More alarming is the fact that one of the community food banks that is located in an apartment building has been forced to close due to a shortage of space and an inability to operate safely. This has put additional pressure on our food bank.

Stonegate Ministry is adapting to its current reality. We are finding ways to serve our community through our programs. **God, Coffee and Me** and the **Women’s Group** are having virtual meetings. We are also looking at ways we can meet some of the needs of youth and children during this time.

The loss of our store revenue is critical. It represents half of our operating revenue, while all of our operating costs continue. We are looking carefully at the CEWS (Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy) but even if we are successful in receiving this assistance, we will still be facing a huge deficit. As we investigate both how we can provide at least some assistance to our clients and search for ways to cover our staff and occupancy costs, we would ask you to consider your financial support for Stonegate Ministry. A gift in any amount will help us get through this difficult time. We would also ask for your prayers for our clients who have come to rely not only on the quality goods offered at very affordable prices, but the camaraderie with staff and volunteers. Their loneliness is accentuated by social distancing. Also remember our staff and all our dedicated volunteers. *(continued on page 2)*

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## OUR MISSION STATEMENT

Stonegate Ministry is an alliance of local Christian churches working in partnership with the community through shared resources, offering programs and opportunities to build healthy relationships, strong families, a sense of belonging and a deeper relationship with God. We endeavour to address the needs of the whole person and families to bridge toward a better life and to be a faithful voice to ensure everyone in the community is treated with justice and Christian compassion.

(continued from page 1) Thank you for your prayers and support. You can go to our website and click on the DONATE button or forward a cheque to 2358 Lake Shore Blvd. West, Toronto, ON M8V 1B6.

May this Easter season be a time of reflection, peace and thanksgiving for you and your loved ones in the midst of our chaotic world.

Horace Knight, Chair  
Stonegate Ministry Board



## OUR FOOD BANK DURING COVID-19



In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, the world is learning to change their way of living in order to combat this virus. Other than essential businesses and services, most places are closed, including schools, and we are mandated by health authorities to stay home with the exception of going out for essentials. At Stonegate Ministry, **our partnership with the Christ Church St. James Food Pantry** is now more crucial than ever in order to help those in need within our community.

People are getting sick. Some are self-isolating. Others have lost their jobs. In this time of uncertainty and unrest, the stress of staying healthy and being able to **provide food and security** to our families is uppermost in our minds. Although Great Finds thrift store is temporarily closed, Stonegate Ministry continues our ministry and our commitment to work together to

build 'A stronger, kinder and more just community' by helping to provide food and supplies to those in need.

As Co-Director of the CCSJ Food Pantry, I am serving alongside able-bodied volunteers making packages of food supplies for various family sizes. These packages are then handed out to families every second Saturday and the last two Wednesdays of each month. On average, we help **between 70 and 80 families** each food bank day, and this number is growing as we have seen an increase of new families needing food.

When I see the devoted volunteers working hard preparing food packages, I think of the grace and kindness of many people trying to help each other and our community. When our clients get their food, the smiles on their faces and the gratitude and relief in their eyes is why we dedicate our time working on the frontlines of this essential service. We are all in this together and we at Stonegate Ministry will

continue to serve as best we can in these difficult days.



Jeannie Martinez,  
Great Finds Manager &  
Co-Director, Christ Church St. James Food Pantry

## “GOD, COFFEE . . . AND ME??” – FINDING A WAY FORWARD

Someone recently noted 3 ways for a ministry to respond during a crisis. To help me remember, I’ve opted for alliteration. Those 3 ways: *Frozen, Fearful, Flexible*.

1. A **“Frozen”** ministry says “We’ve always done ministry a certain way, in a certain place and now we can’t. Therefore, the ministry is ‘on ice’ until the crisis is over”.
2. A **“Fearful”** ministry says “We may have to try something a little different...though ever so reluctantly...and only until we are in the clear. Oh how we long for how things were before! Maybe we won’t make it? ... or maybe we should prepare to close up?”
3. A **“Flexible”** ministry remembers the key: it is *not* about the method – methods may have to be changed oodles of times. It is *always* about the message, and the ministry is all about the **message of Jesus**.

It is good to give God praise for the flexible attitude and approach Stonegate Ministry is exhibiting during the Covid-19 crisis. There truly is prayerful determination to find a way forward in order to be there for others. Yes, it is challenging. But ministry is *supposed* to be challenging. Can any of you think of a passage of Scripture that suggests otherwise?

I am thankful this flexible attitude includes the “*God, Coffee...and me??*” outreach. For over 4 years this Bible teaching program, designed **to introduce people to Jesus** and cultivate relationships with Him, has operated out of coffee shops and currently *Nimman’s Thai Restaurant*. Those options are not available for us now. Thankfully, many of our friends signed on to keep on gathering: same time, same day of the week, but through an audio and/or video chat. A bible study outline is e-mailed ahead of time. We ‘check in’ for a few minutes, then ‘deep dive’ into Scripture, and conclude with prayer to encourage us to ‘work out’ what God is ‘working in’. And the bonus? People who have not attended previously are joining in. The circle is widening!

There is always an extra chair at this ‘virtual’ table.

Someone said years ago “*Blessed are the flexible for they will not get bent out of shape*”. Jesus is the Trail-blazer. Ours is to faithfully follow in His steps. We praise God for how He makes a way through the wilderness, shines a light in darkness, and brings peace in a storm. We pray this difficult time we are all now experiencing will strengthen the faith of believers all the more while helping seekers become finders and wanderers to ‘come home’. Amen?



Yours, together on the journey,

Bruce Smith

On assignment with Stonegate Ministry

(If YOU would be interested in joining a “*God, Coffee....and me??*” gathering, just send a little note to me by email and I will respond by sending you the video link and notes for the upcoming week). [rbsmith055@gmail.com](mailto:rbsmith055@gmail.com)



## FINDING WAYS TO STAY CONNECTED

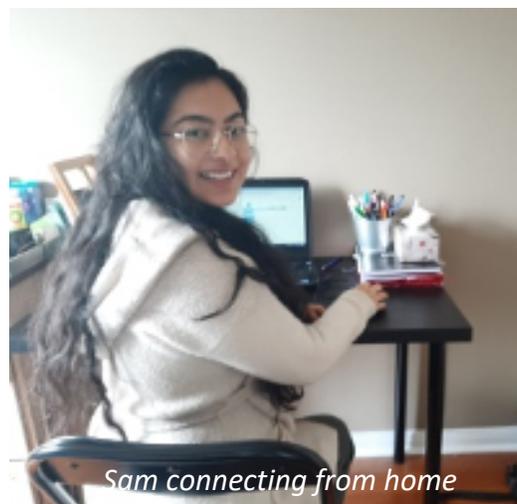
Though our community and world at large are experiencing chaos and restlessness right now, God is weaving us together more intimately, and is bringing light into darkness.

This month, we are slowly transitioning some of our programs online using Zoom. We know that **loneliness is at an all-time high** right now, especially for those who are living alone. I am hearing many stories of people with depression and anxiety,

who are finding it increasingly difficult to cope during this time of social distancing. We know that it is more important now than ever to stay connected and to let people know they are not alone.

So far, we've been able to host our **Circle of Friends** program online, along with **God, Coffee, and Me**. It is incredible to hear participants encouraging one another and offering support as they share resources and tips on where to buy groceries and how to stay safe. Even though the transition from moving in-person programs to online spaces has been a difficult learning curve for all of us, we are all willing to learn and move outside our comfort zones for the sake of community. One woman said, "I'm glad to have community through this conference call, **it's good to know we are not alone**. It gives me strength." Our dedicated program facilitators have been calling participants weekly to check in on them, and each week more participants are learning how to stay connected through programs like Zoom. Our hope is that our community will know that Stonegate Ministry intends on being present during this time. We are here to talk, to offer emotional support, to refer resources, and to let our community know that we are in this together.

**God is doing something wonderful.** He is using our volunteers, our technology, our foodbank, our participants, and all of you, to demonstrate to our community that there is hope. Thank you for your prayers, your donations, and your support, it is making a difference.



*Sam connecting from home*

Samantha Coelho  
Director Ministry Programs

## CONTACT US

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Contact us at 416-255-6282 or [office@stonegateministry.ca](mailto:office@stonegateministry.ca)

Stonegate Ministry is a registered non-profit charity.

Donations may be made by cheque or online at [www.stonegateministry.ca](http://www.stonegateministry.ca)

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